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Our History of Bad Trades

Whatever made the KGB think it could take hostage an American correspondent, to be bartered for an accused spy, flouting all decency and the process of justice?

We did. That is, the United States government did by its history of willingness to make such deals.

When Nicholas Daniloff, Moscow correspondent for U.S. News & World Report, was arrested immediately following the jailing in New York of Gennadi F. Zakharov, Soviet employee of the United Nations, the Russians were merely playing out a familiar scenario more than 20 years old.

In 1963 Igor A. Ivanov, a chauffeur for the Soviet Amtorg trading company in New York, was arrested on espionage charges. Within a few days Prof. Frederic C. Barghoorn, Yale University scholar on a visit to Moscow, was arrested in a staged encounter with a Soviet citizen, who thrust papers into his hand.

Several days later Barghoorn was released in response to what was termed a personal appeal from President Kennedy. The other shoe dropped slowly. Ivanov was convicted, sentenced to 20 years in prison, released to the Soviet Embassy pending his appeal and eventually permitted to return to Moscow.

The script was rerun in 1978 when two Soviet employees of the United Nations, Valdik Enger and Rudolf Chernayev, were arrested as spies. The KGB then seized a visiting American businessman, F. Jay Crawford of the International Harvester Corp., on smuggling charges.

The three were released in custody of their respective ambassadors. Crawford was found guilty and permitted to leave the Soviet Union. The two Soviet agents were convicted, sentenced to 50 years in prison—then traded for five imprisoned Soviet dissidents.

The spy-for-dissident equation, adding a new dimension to prisoner barter, reached its full flower with the arrangement for the release of Anatoly Shcharansky. He was freed last February as part of a "package deal" that included three West Germans imprisoned in East Germany and five Soviet bloc agents held in the West.

The key agent in the trade was Karl F. Koehler, Czech-born former employee of the Central Intelligence Agency—the first East European spy known to have penetrated the CIA. Sent by the Czechoslovak intelligence service to become an American citizen, study at Columbia University and from there work his way into the CIA, he was finally caught in November 1984, with his wife on the point of leaving for Vienna.

Koehler instructed his American lawyer, Robert Fierer, of Atlanta, to fly to Prague, where he would find his government ready to intervene with Moscow to exchange him for Shcharansky. To his own amazement Fierer discovered the Czechoslovak gov-

ernment, and then the State Department, prepared to negotiate such a deal.

The outcome was a closed-door session last Feb. 3 before Judge Shirley Wohl Kram in Federal District Court in Manhattan. Koehler and Assistant U.S. Attorney Bruce A. Green signed a formal agreement in which the Czech agent pleaded guilty to espionage, renounced his American citizenship and accepted a term of life imprisonment—to be immediately commuted "at such time as the United States government determines that the conditions of the [prisoner] exchange have been met."

So the Koehlers and Shcharansky went, in opposite directions, across Berlin's Glienicke Bridge, well known since the exchange of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers and Soviet master spy Rudolf Abel, as "the Bridge of Spies." At the Geneva summit last November, President Reagan had appealed to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to release the Jewish dissident, imprisoned on trumped-up charges of spying for the CIA, as a humanitarian gesture. When freedom came, a Soviet spokesman told the German press, "We exchange him as an agent—against ours."

Should anyone, then, have been surprised

you have been found guilty of espionage, Mr. Daniloff, and your trial will be held next week after a fair and thorough investigation...



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that the next time a Soviet agent without diplomatic immunity was arrested and jailed without bail, an American non-diplomat would be almost immediately taken as a negotiating chip for the next deal?

What was different this time was only that it was a journalist rather than a businessman or professor. Other American correspondents have been harassed by the KGB and expelled. (As a CBS News correspondent in 1957, I was arrested and held for an hour and a half on a phony charge, and eventually excluded from the Soviet Union.) But Daniloff was the first American correspondent to go to jail. He was also the first whose arrest was officially announced by the KGB itself in a cynical imitation of the FBI's press conference announcement of Zakharov's arrest.

Prisoner exchanges are motivated by some combination of compassion and expediency. But when a democracy plays the Soviet game of exchanging the guilty for the innocent, it buys trouble for the future. As with terrorists, you may only be encouraging them to do it again.

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